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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a redefinition of the term "television," examines problems of determining the effects of television on children, reviews research on possible effects of TV on children, and concludes by focusing on prosocial, educational programming. The argument is made that because we are immersed in the phenomenon of television, we can not obtain an accurate assessment of the macro-effects of the medium. Such assessments are best made by a social historian perhaps a century or two from now. The characterization of TV as an exploitative and manipulative medium which builds passive information processing habits among viewers is viewed as one-sided and incomplete. Television's potential for prosocial programming is emerging in popular educational programs for children which, in conjunction with adult direction, stimulate active learning orientations. While the influence of programs on children is still a controverial issue, agreement on the influence of advertisements exists. Children do learn from commercials and also learn to evaluate them. Agency attempts to limit exploitative practices are indicated. More parent involvement in their children's use of TV is recommended. (Author/RH)

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TELEVISION AND ITS EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

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by

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Prepared for

Presentation to the First Congress on Education,
sponsored by the Canadian School Trustees' Association,
Toronto, Canada, June 21, 1973

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Television and its Effects on Children

by Lewis Miller

For presentation to the First Congress on Education,
sponsored by the Canadian School Trustees' Association,
Toronto, June 21, 1978

In trying to come closer to the extremely difficult subject of the effects of television on children I shall comment briefly on five broad topics. Then we shall have an opportunity for discussion.

First, before reviewing some of the generalizations that have been made by researchers I should like to say something about what is meant by the word "television". It's far from being simply an electronic box that sits in front of passive viewers.

Secondly, I shall consider the difficulties of arriving at any definite conclusions in this cause-effect kind of question.

Next, in reviewing some of the research on the possible effects of television on children, I shall consider the topics of violent programming; and then advertising.

Finally, I wish to focus on prosocial programming, including of course educational programming. In passing, I shall present samples of such programming.

I do not intend to present samples of what would generally be labelled as violent programming, such as "Kojak", "Starsky and Hutch", and the recent Norton versus Holmes boxing match. I'm sure that simply the mention of these titles is sufficient to evoke appropriate images. Besides, I recently read a research report[1] on an experiment in which five sets of men were observed by their wives during a week of their watching, respectively, five different types of programs, ranging from those high in prosocial or "helpful" content (such as "The Waltons") to those high in violent or "hurtful" content. The researcher concluded that "people who saw prosocial programs exhibited the smallest amount of hurtful behaviour during the week" while

the next highest level of those exhibiting hurtful behaviour was in "the violence-viewing group". The highest level of both hurtful and helpful behaviour was exhibited, would you believe, by those who were given the freedom to watch whatever they wanted, as often as they wanted. This "natural" group, to the researcher's surprise, "averaged only 10 hours of viewing per week---half as much as the other groups"...(and, therefore) "...simply had more time to interact with their families." Some of the wives reported that those who watched the prosocial programming tended to act in more lovable, and more loving ways. So, far be it from me to show excerpts from "Police Story" or any of the other formula violence programs, lest I be held in any way responsible for possible unlovable behaviour later today.---Perhaps I shouldn't even have mentioned the name, "Kojak".

Employing the approach of getting closer to what an entity is by considering what it does, I shall now offer a sample of programming. And to set the stage for challenging some of the stereotyped notions that we often read and hear about television, I shall begin by presenting a brief sequence from one of our own programs. Although this excerpt comes from a series designed to support the curricula of the first three grades of Ontario schools, the principles of its design and production may be used for most programming produced for children. While, obviously, I am making a defence for television, at least for a significant part of it, I certainly do not wish to be understood as making a wholesale defence. Regrettably, as I'm sure you will agree, there is far too much room for improvement in television programming directed at children---and adults, for that matter. It is by no means a tale of gloom and violence, however, and just as there are many gems in the print literature nowadays, along with the tons of trash, so there are many gems in television programming for the selective viewer. The excerpt you will see comes from a series that, we are convinced, is a gem

in programming for children with their teachers, as well as for children at home with their parents, or alone. The sequence is from a program entitled "Readalong", designed to support the curriculum of the first three reading levels in Ontario schools.

There are other important elements of this series. The television component is merely one part of a learning system. The teacher receives a teacher's guide designed to provide background information on the items presented in the program and to offer suggestions for follow-up classroom activities. The teacher receives, also, an activities workbook that may be photocopied for each student for activities that may be undertaken on her or his own. There is also a songbook, with the words and music for each of the songs heard on the program.

As you will note, our program planners, writers, and researchers have worked on the principle that the most effective way to learn reading (as well as most other things) is to learn by <u>doing</u>, and there is opportunity and time for responding to the cues posed in the program. Students are in fact encouraged to react; and it is gratifying to our producers and researchers to be in a classroom when this program is shown. One of our researchers (Sister Patricia Donovan) who undertook summative evaluation work on the series to assess whether our objectives had been achieved, had the following to say:

> The children watched attentively, laughed, groaned and squealed appropriately in response to the program. Most children read aloud as the words, phrases and sentences appeared on the screen. All children seemed to be trying to do so and read at least some of the printed material.[2]

Sister Pat had much more to say in her report about the imaginative use of this series by teachers, such as that of the teachers who "have made READALONG the basis of their language program", with the result that children in their classes "know the words and melodies" of the songs and, as she has written,

"enter into the spirit of the program with fervor....They have used poems and puzzles from the program as the basis of word games and word reviews between viewings....(and) have composed and illustrated stories related to READALONG to share with one another."[3]

While over 7,000 primary teachers in Ontario regularly use this series in their classrooms, we broadcast it also during out-of-school hours (6:30 to 6:45 p.m., on weekdays), and, according to our most recent data from the BBM Bureau of Broadcast Measurement, approximately 57,000 Ontario children take command of the home sets at that competitive period to watch "Readalong". While most benefit is achieved if a teacher or parent is supervising the viewing child, the television component obviously stands on its own for the sake of the child at home who might be viewing alone.

While the program planners are primarily concerned with the cognitive skills of reading improvement--and, as I have said, we have research data indicating that this objective has clearly been achieved--they are also concerned to take advantage of other things that television can do so very well. In the sequence you will see, for example, you will note both the easy rapport between the girl and the boy from different racial backgrounds, as well as the fact that there is no sex-role stereotyping suggesting the dominance of either the male or the female. If anything, in this particular instance, the girl just might be a fraction more dominant---perhaps a useful corrective in this yet male dominated society.

Let's, then, see the sequence from "Readalong".

From our survey data, as well as from the hundreds of letters we have received from teachers, their students, and even chain letters and drawings from entire classes, we know both that television can be a helpful learning tool for the development of reading skills, as well as simply an enjoyable television program that is voluntarily watched regularly by thousands

of children in their homes. As a result of "Readalong", and a number of other of our series, by the way, the OECA has become one of Canada's most influential exporters of Canadian culture. According to our most recent market reports, schools in over thirty-five states of the United States are now making regular use of "Readalong".

However much "Readalong" is in advance of most of children's television today it is my belief that in general the mode of presentation and utilization of most television programming is yet relatively primitive. This leads me further into the topic, what is the meaning of the word "television"? If one were to employ the metaphor of the development of the automobile, television today is still in the Model A stage. Nevertheless, so much has happened, so very fast! Although the first successful attempt to broadcast audio-visual 'messages' began in the late 1920's--such a short time ago in the history of man--the enormous demands of the Second World War delayed production of transmitters and receivers. By 1949 a mere 2.3% of American homes had television receivers. The first Canadian television station was not opened until 1952. Today the home television receiver is almost a universal piece of equipment in North American homes, and this same trend is seen throughout the world. According to estimates released by RCA in April 1976, there are now more television sets than telephones in the world . "...364 million television sets have been sold worldwide. This compares to 360 million telephones...."[4] In 1976, also, (to borrow an inappropriate but suggestive metaphor) a kind of 'watershed' was noted when over half the population of the world had access to television receivers.

In the meantime, too, the invention of new electronic production, re-production, and transmission equipment has rushed along at a hectic pace. The invention of videotape alone, along with the recorders and play-back machines we now take so much for granted, was of enormous importance. This

is the kind of quiet advance that is probably of greater significance than the ability to transmit and receive television signals between the Earth and the moon, and then Mars.

We all now also take for granted the wonders of satellite re-transmission, which so often nowadays unites hundreds of millions of people throughout the world as instant spectators, mostly to the successes and sorrows of athletes and astronauts. Horrifyingly, through quickly processed film and satellite re-transmission, some American parents watched their sons die of wounds in Vietnam. Perhaps television helped to end that disturbing war---sometimes referred to, by the way, as TV's first war. There are other notable benefits. During the past year, for example, I had the thrill of listening to a report of a medical team from the University of Western Ontario who had used the Hermes satellite to link up with and assist a far more modestly endowed clinic in Moose Factory, far to our north. Via satellite, surgeons in the very act of operation are able to expose their patients and their electronically recorded symptoms to expert consultant colleagues in other parts of the world.

Almost weekly those of us who are involved in the use of communications media hear of new discoveries that boggle the mind for a few days before we, too, take them for granted. For example, the relatively new development of fibre optics permits the transmission of literally hundreds of signals, including radio, television, and telephone through the same conduit, or 'cable', or whatever it is to be called, which, enclosing more than a hundred fibres, is no larger than the telephone wire that now feeds into our homes. No doubt you have seem the Bell telephone commercials in which a woman demonstrates the thickness of one of the fibre strands by extending a single strand of hair. Today in Canada, Canada Wire and Cable and Bell Canada are moving fast in the development of fibre-optics systems. In London, Ontario,

for example, a consortium of cable companies is well into the first phase of such development. And two years ago a Japanese company unveiled a wired-city system that has been under development since 1972. Here is a description of that system:

> (This system) initially will connect 300 apartments, eventually 3,000-5,000 in Higashi Ikoma project near Osaka. Two-way fibre-optic cable will provide 29 channels downstream (70-300 MHz), 5 upstream (up to 50 MHz). Among services provided, in addition to those also supplied at Tama (Local TV studio for residents; Pay-TV channel; Fax channel for newspapers; Teletext for special announcements; Still Picture Request Service; two-way educational channel, and Multiple-choice-computer-assisted tests): (1) TV Request, permittingsubscribers to dial up requested videotapes, on first-come-first-served basis. (2) Data Request, & Fact Service, providing on-screen information, with libraries, etc., as source. (3) Fax Request: hard-copy books, directories, hotel information, timetables, reference material. (4) Shopping card into slot in home for purchases of products on screen. (6) Ticket, hotel, beauty parlor and clinic reservations. (7) Two-way service for medical diagnosis. (8) Meter Reading. (9) Burglar-fire alarm. (10) Automatic emergency channel. (11) Televote, permitting subscriber polling.[5]

Television is integrally linked, then, with fibre-optics, the computer, the telephone, radio, satellites, videotape and videodisc recorders, the digitalization of the audio-visual signal, teletext systems, facsimile, microfiche, super-microfiche, and a host of other electronic developments. The spirit of the pace of this change has been captured eloquently in a booklet entitled "Communications: Hawaii's New Horizon", published in March, 1978, in which Hideto Kono (Director of the Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development) wrote as follows:

> When Henry Ford began mass production of his automobile, he never imagined how vast a change would result in the face of America, now crisscrossed with freeways and highways carrying 100 million vehicles each day.
>
> When Thomas Edison made his first electric lamp, he could not envision the extraordinary extent of illumination flooding a world which up to that time was mantled in darkness every night when the sun went down.

> Today, a new and silent revolution is taking place which will bring equally vast changes. The revolution is in the field of microelectronics and other technologies which are the physical means of expanding and speeding human communication. The results are already astounding.
>
> The human voice is carried with the speed of light in tiny conduit-threads of a cheap and abundant glass-fibre material which eventually will be woven into our world as nerves now sensitize every part of the human body. Once-giant computers needed for incredibly complex calculations now are desk-top size and perform faster, better, cheaper, and with greater safety than anything ever imagined 50 years ago....[6]

With this kind of communications revolution moving apace it is probable that within twenty years most teachers, via the touch-tone telephone and an accessible computer terminal, will be able to call up almost immediately relevant television support materials, as well as to have their students participate in interactive computer-assisted instruction with the aid of their television monitors. If this seems remote consider that as of December, 1977, in Columbus, Ohio, an organization representing six Ohio universities and colleges, in association with a cable company with a potential reach of 100,000 homes, initiated a 30-channel, two-way interactive system that offers credit courses, among other educational and general offerings. In the first three weeks of operation 55 cable subscribers had enrolled in college-level courses for credit. The word "television" thus is able even now to be applied to a dynamic, rapidly changing system that goes far beyond the stereotyped assumptions of its being essentially a one-way system serving passive viewers. For this, among other reasons, it is important to try to be more precise when one considers the question of the effects of television on children.

In outlining some of the difficulties of trying to take a snap-shot, so to speak, of this ever-shifting communications giant I have been moving into my second topic, that is, the difficulties of arriving at any definite conclusions in this cause-effect kind of question. I am reminded of a

statement written three years ago by Richard Adler (Assistant Director of the Aspen Institute Program on Communications and Society). While he was writing about television in the United States we all have to recognize that, for better or worse--mostly worse, alas--we in Canada are strongly under the influence of American television. He writes as follows:

> trying to gauge the impact of television on American society in the past twenty-five years has been something like attempting to understand the dynamics of a tidal wave---when one is in the middle of it.

It would be remiss of me at this point if I were not to mention our own media prophet, Marshall McLuhan, especially his best-known statement, "the medium is the message". He has written that his central thesis, in his Gutenberg Galaxy, is but a footnote to the thesis of Professor Harold Innis, the University of Toronto political scientist who, in his The Bias of Communication (1951), argued that man's major modes of communications, whether they be river systems, railways, telephone, radio, and other modes of communication, are the major conditioning influences of man's behaviour. While I believe that McLuhan overstates the case he is obviously on to a strong point when he invites us to consider the influential force on our whole environment made by the very existence of the medium of television. Just as the Gutenberg press has been so powerful an influence on Western society, so, too, the medium of television is a powerful medium of communications that will probably radically alter the history of the world---if it has not already done so. But here we are dealing with what might be termed macro-effects that are best seen in retrospect. Supposing we could transpose well-trained social scientists of our day back five centuries, how could the best of them ever have foretold what would have been the effects of the press as they stood beside Gutenberg and watched the pages of the Bible come off his press. To assess the general effects of television is indeed "something like attempting to understand the dynamics of a tidal wave---when one is in the middle of it." This is a

story best to be told by a social historian perhaps a century or two from now.

Among the more interesting, and more difficult questions that will be considered--indeed are being considered today--are those concerning the symbol systems of communications media. Among scholars who have written on this subject, David Olson, of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and Gavriel Salomon, of the Hebrew University, Israel, have pointed out what it must have meant to a primarily oral society, familiar with speech symbols, to begin to have to cope with the medium of print, with symbols in no way like the symbols of speech. A highly sophisticated mental process of which we print-literate people are unaware must take place every time we decode oral symbols from print symbols, and vice-versa. With television it seems yet too soon to understand the nature of any new symbol system that we might be devising. Salomon points to an interesting difference, however, when he distinguishes between "a televised lesson",[8] in which the camera is directed at a person presenting a traditional lesson, and "a television lesson", in which the medium of television with all its associated technology, is used to introduce powerful learning tools that are not possible by the teacher on her or his own. There might be, that is, functions of a new medium, using its own symbol system, to achieve educational objectives in other ways, ways, indeed, that will employ new symbol systems as unlike to print, as print is to speech. David Olson makes this point as follows:

> Perhaps the function of the new media is <u>not</u> primarily that of providing more effective means for conveying the kinds of information evolved in the last five hundred years of book or literate culture, but rather that of using the new media as a means of exploring and representing our experience in ways that parallel those involved in that literate culture.[9]

It is apparent, I believe, that in their intuitive, creative ways, good educational broadcasters are clearly aware of the distinction Salomon has made between a "television lesson" and a "televised lesson". The "Readalong" sequence you have seen earlier is, I suggest, one that effectively makes use of the capabilities of the new medium. It also of course uses traditional means as well, including print support materials, music and songs. But it blends them all together in a way that is clearly not possible by traditional means.

Another of our series that does much the same kind of thing in support of a traditional educational objective is the series "Math Patrol". This series, too, is aimed at supporting the curricula of the first three levels of Ontario schools; and, again, from our research data and from responses from teachers and students, we are able to say that the educational objectives have been met.

Let's then, see this sequence, from "Addition #3", designed for the third grade level of the mathematics program. (SEQUENCE FROM MATH PATROL)

As for the overall effect or impact of television on children, or on education generally, it is still too early to be definite. I doubt if we ever will be; and that is because of the nature of the problem. Thanks to the great Scots philosopher, David Hume, about two hundred years ago, we immediately have to acknowledge that in questions of causes and effects we are not dealing with mathematical or logical validity. There can be no 'certainty', in the strict sense of the word. We are dealing with probability--- statistical probability dealing with a host of variables concerning that most unpredictable of all creatures, man. It is the same kind of question that has plagued anti-smoking advocates in their well-meaning efforts to link cigarette-smoking with lung-cancer; and, as we know, despite all the weight of statistical and funereal evidence suggesting a causal link the able

advocates for the tobacco industry keep insisting that there can be no logically conclusive evidence.

This leads us into the question of the possible effects of violence in television programming, and the fact that both the advocates against violent programming as well as the program bosses who keep giving it to us, cannot be certain in their stands. While the statistical evidence is sufficient to suggest that all of us should be much more concerned than we tend to be about public displays of violence in television programming, and elsewhere, the dollar advocates of the television industry, in the United States especially, keep insisting that there is no conclusive evidence to suggest a causal link between such violent displays and violent action after the fact. Besides, as the ratings clearly indicate, and as the broadcasters are quick to insist, they are only giving us what we want anyway. That, probably, is the crux of the matter. Most of us appear to want what we are offered.

There has come to be a polarization of extreme views on this question, and, regrettably, several of the more popular recent writings against violence on television have been so hysterical, illogical, and unscientific that they are, I believe, damaging a good cause. Of course, parents and teachers should be concerned about violence on television, just as they should be concerned about some of the print literature that is so readily available. But let's be careful about the evidence we use, and make sure that we are looking in appropriate directions in our advocacy. We are not going to be able to turn the thing off, as some writers and critics actually seem to be advocating, so, why not try to use it for all of its potential benefits?

This is the kind of message offered by a more temperate writer in a recent review of four books on the subject. In his review, "TV is not the World", Jeff Greenfield suggests that a major problem we face is that we "approach television the way the Lilliputians must have approached Gulliver.

Its presence among us, its size and reach, is undeniable." He continues:

> It must have been difficult for the Lilliputians to avoid ascribing every new event in their lives to the presence of this giant. Gulliver cast a giant shadow; but did he produce every solar eclipse? Gulliver in the water produced mighty waves; but did he control the tides?[10]

The four books he reviews, he suggests, all are guilty of committing the fallacy of "Post hoc, Ergo propter hoc", and they ignore other possible factors in our lives that might well be even more influential. Among the many other factors that come up time and again for example, in the research on the possible effects of television on children are the influences of parents, teachers, peers, and other public models. These, too, are 'giants' among the factors of influence on a child, and it's perhaps indeed these that are the major factors that counter the aggressive behaviours of many children after their exposure to violent programming.

On the question of the possible influence of television programming on children I shall cite several quotations to demonstrate that we still have a hung jury. At one extreme we have this strong assertion from one group of researchers:

> ...laboratory studies, relational field studies, and naturalistic experiments all show that exposure to television can, and does, make viewers significantly more aggressive...[11]
>
> (Liebert, Neale, and Davidson)

At the other extreme we have the following statement from Drs. Dennis Howitt and Guy Cumberbatch, both reputable and respectable researchers:

> The central theme of this book is that the Mass Media do not have any significant effect on the level of violence in society.[12]

Perhaps the strongest statement in opposition to violent programming comes from Dr. Jesse Steinfeld, the U.S. Surgeon General who succeeded the Surgeon General who brought in the well publicized report in 1971. Disturbed by media distortions concerning the report, Dr. Steinfeld stated categorically

that "the study shows for the first time a causal connection between violence shown on television and subsequent aggressive behaviour by children."[13] The evidence, he felt, was sufficient to provide "a basis for intelligent action by the networks, the FCC and the Congress."[14] Need I say that, to date, very little has been done towards implementing these recommendations. Faced with such a broad spectrum of differing evidence, the Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry, chaired by the Hon. Miss Judy LaMarsh, tended similarly to be guarded in ascribing any cause-effect relations. Miss LaMarsh has summarized her conclusions on the subject in the following statement from the June 3, 1978 edition of TV Guide:

> ...we accumulated a body of research from across Canada and thoroughly reviewed research undertakings in Europe and the United States, but I had to conclude that we are not yet able to give definite answers to the fundamental question of why we react as we do to the stimulus of television.
>
> What does appear clear is that the viewer carries away from the domestic screen whatever tends to reinforce his own experience, derived from his own environment and training. Undeniably, we learn from everything we watch.[15]

Despite its guarded language, however, the Commission was sufficiently concerned to recommend, as indeed its first recommendation, that there should be "wide-scale changes in present procedures to the end that the communications industry, by diminishing the exploitation of violence, will reflect more accurately the quality of life to which most Canadians aspire." Perhaps the mood of the Commission has been best expressed in a report submitted to it by Dr. Richard Goranson, of the Department of Psychology, York University, who wrote as follows:

> Of course, television is only one of many factors that influence children's behaviour. It is obvious that not every child becomes aggressive every time a violent program is seen. But this is not really the point. The problem that concerns both parents and psychologists is the likelihood that demonstrations of violence on television serve to increase the overall level of aggressive attitudes and behaviours in children's lives.[16]
>
> (Volume 5, p. 5)

In considering the influence of television advertising on children I'm reminded of one of the Globe and Mail's recent "Morning Smiles". A child, brought up in the concrete jungle of a city, was on his first visit to the country with his parents. There he saw a rainbow for the first time. He was enthralled. Finally he said, "It's beautiful, but what is it advertising?" The anecdote has a point, and it's perhaps not surprising that the verdict of researchers and policy makers on the influence of television advertising on children is by no means so guarded as is the verdict on violence. In a recently published report by Richard Adler, (of the Graduate School of Education, Harvard Univeristy), and others, for the National Science Foundation, Washington, the Executive Summary bluntly states the following:

> First, it is clear from the available evidence that television advertising <u>does</u> influence children. Research has demonstrated that children attend to and learn from commercials, and that advertising is at least moderately successful in creating positive attitudes toward and desire for products advertised.[17]

The summary goes on to say that the age levels of children are of considerable importance.

> Existing research clearly establishes that children become more skilled in evaluating television advertising as they grow older, and that to treat all children from 2 to 12 as a homogeneous group masks important, perhaps crucial differences. These findings suggest that both researchers and policymakers give greater attention to the problems of younger viewers, since they appear to be the most vulnerable.[18]

Adler's report is reinforced by the "Report of the Council on Children, Media and Merchandising", a "compilation of relevant testimony before the Federal Trade Commission", published in June, 1977. The evidence of Dr. Samuel Ball, of the Educational Testing Service, is interesting:

> Children do learn from commercials on television, and I might add perhaps especially from commercial-type presentation on television.

> For reasons that are fairly obvious, I think. One is that television commercials generally are well produced. They have more work put into them than a program as a whole in terms of per second of time that they are on the air. They are shortened and children's attention spans, therefore, are not taxed and they are specifically made to hold attention.[19]

Among the concerns of those giving evidence are that children are often misled by food commercials, for example, which advertise pre-sugared cereals as foods which provide needed "energy". There is no way that the young child could translate what the word "energy" means. One researcher stationed near a food-counter in a supermarket actually overheard the pleas of children as they passed shelves of some cereal saying to their mothers that they needed the cereal since it gave them "energy". Occasionally the children would themselves place the cartons of cereal into the baskets, and the mothers would not object. Among concerns of nutritionists who gave evidence were what they believed to be increasing trends to both obesity in children and tooth-decay.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the United States Federal Trade Commission has recently proposed a rule that would call "for an outright ban on all TV commercials directed at children under 8" (Toronto Star, May 31, 1978, p. C1).

In Canada an association of advertisers and broadcasters for some years have voluntarily devised a code that would restrict advertising aimed at children under 12, although, during school-day morning hours advertising is permitted if aimed at the family, a parent, or an adult; thus the Canadian voluntary code does permit advertising that might well influence children to persuade their parents to buy some products, even though the code prescribes that commercials "must not directly urge children to buy or urge them to ask their parents to make inquiries or purchases" (Star report). There is still a fair amount of leeway, obviously, for indirect or subtle pressure. The CBC's self-imposed commercial policy is somewhat more strict than the voluntary

code (which it approves in principle), the CBC forbidding any advertising whatever within or adjacent to any children's programming. Consider, though, that in 17% of our homes young children control the home sets, with another 42% sharing in the decision-making well into evening hours, with the peak viewing hour for children under twelve coming about 8 p.m., tapering off gradually, with some children watching with their parents even up to midnight. They take in the whole gamut from liquor commercials to feminine hygiene douches and sprays.

These considerations concerning the dynamic nature of whatever it is that we call television, as well as the difficulties in establishing any specific cause-effect relationships, especially concerning the effects of violent programming on children, all tend to raise perhaps more questions than answers. Shortly I shall raise several, although, as you will see, they will perhaps tend to be rhetorical and directive, since I, too, am very much concerned with our television fare. Before raising these questions, however, I should like to show you several excerpts from programs we have made. My motive will be obvious. I happen to think they are good prosocial programs for children and teen-agers. I would like to see more of them.

POLKA DOT DOOR (EVERY MORNING AND FROM 6:00 to 6:30 P.M. MON. TO SUN.---UNDUPLICATED AUDIENCE FOR EARLY EVENING - 100,000

INSIDE OUT---SCHOOL PERIODS, USING CLASSROOMS - 2,790

COPE---FOR TEEN-AGERS--PROBLEMS OF SEXUAL CHANGES
WED. 8:00-8:30 P.M.- 19,400

ALMOST HOME

Among generalizations that may be made and questions that may be asked on the basis of the preceding considerations are at least the following. I'm sure that you can add more:

There is no question that children learn from and are influenced in their attitudes by television programming. If we are interested in what,

and how, our children learn, isn't it important to be even more directly concerned about children's programming?

Children learn more effectively, and their learning is checked and reinforced, if they view programs with teachers and parents. The teacher will be present in class-room viewing sessions, but the parent might not be attentive in the home. Isn't it of great importance to try to be present as much as possible?

The kinds of models and modelling children experience, whether on or away from television, are most certainly influential in the formative development of the child. Should we not search out models within the programming schedules that would be of the kind of which we would approve?

There is sufficient well-researched documentation to suggest that parents are most often oblivious of what the child is watching, especially on Saturday mornings. The well-meaning question we occasionally hear on late-night television, "Do you know where your children are?" might well be complemented by the question, "Do you know what your children are viewing?"

Action groups of concerned parents and teachers in the United States have had an influence on programming, program schedules, and on advertising. Canadians tend to be apathetic. Is it not perhaps time for parent-teachers associations or organizations such as the Canadian Broadcasting Institute to become more active and more vocal? You would be surprised at the influence of a few dozen telephone calls, or letters, directed to heads of programming.

If you are at all concerned about the amount and the degree of violence on a particular station, or within a particular program, do you not think that you have sufficient influence in the family to direct the child to some other activity or program?

Does your child watch as much as four or five hours of programming per day, which seems to be close to the average viewing for children? Do

you think this is too much? Do you not think that he or she might be doing some other activity? Do you do, or say anything about this in the family?

In conclusion, I might suggest that there is perhaps some historic comfort for all of us in being reminded that every new medium of communication seems to have been of great concern to those who were wedded to the old. Even the wise Socrates shied away from print. We might all be pleased by the fact that his great pupil, Plato, was a print man. And, as David Olson has pointed out, "In the Middle Ages, writing was not to be taught in the schools; to do so would have violated the monopoly held by the guild of the master scribes". As late as 1661, writes Olson, the French High Court "passed a decree that scribes must not on any account teach reading and...schoolmasters must not teach writing and that neither be allowed to teach mathematics...." Television in North America is still young and dynamic. Let's mould it for better service.

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June 21, 1978

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